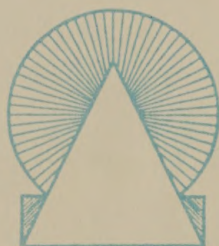


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Arcane Stories

BY FRANCIS MERCHANT

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Arcane Stories—First Series
by Francis Merchant

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20 Nassau Street, Suite 250 E
Princeton, New Jersey 08540

Arcane Stories

INTRODUCTION

WHEN Francis Merchant (1912–1981) died on January 5, a teaching and writing career of very special quality ended. Born and raised in Brooklyn, N.Y., he received his college degrees from New York City educational institutions: his B.S. from Brooklyn College, his M.S. from CCNY, and his Ph.D. from New York University. Almost his entire professional life, however, was lived away from the city of his birth.

My husband and I happily shared college teaching careers for many years. Because we were interested in becoming acquainted with various parts of this country, we took positions in areas as widely distant as New Mexico, Wisconsin, and the Southern states of Georgia and North Carolina. During this period he served as a professor and as chairman of the English Department and Division of the Humanities.

During this wide experience of working with students of all races and creeds, his metaphysical approach to the problems of humanity was often expressed. Whether he was teaching or writing, he was always addressing the human condition, the ongoing human dilemma, with a voice of higher reason and profound spiritual insight.

His predilection for metaphysical thinking is the golden thread that unifies practically all of his writing. "All problems are metaphysical," he would say. He once used this statement as the title of a lecture he gave in Chicago. His basic stance was that of a philosopher espousing a *philosophy* of metaphysics and a *psychology* of metaphysics. This approach accounts for the wide range of human problems that came under his scrutiny, as well as for the power of synthesis that integrated all his literary work, regardless of the variety of outward forms he used.

As a teenager, he began studying the Ancient Wisdom teachings and the various world religions and never ceased to do so. This body of knowledge became an integral part of his thinking, of his consciousness. The light streaming from the Wisdom teachings inspired his own insights and illuminated his interpretation of the various and diverse fields of knowledge through which he expressed himself, whether it was philosophy, comparative religion, psychology, poetry, drama, or symbolism.

His original insights, fused with his highly developed literary skills, lend a unique and sometimes controversial quality to his presentations. He strikes his own resonant note, filled with the overtones of beauty, and based on universal principles and spiritual synthesis. Among his favorite themes are: the divinity in man; the paradox of man's physical frailty, contrasted with the surging upward thrust of aspiration to the Highest; the brotherhood of man; the justice of the cosmos (based on universal laws); the symbolism evident in Nature; the significance of the stars, including man's and Earth's relationship to them. The beauty and awesome splendor of the stars appealed powerfully to his poetic, imaginative sense; our relationship to them he intuitively grasped as a spiritual fact of life.

An additional theme, apparently more mundane, should be mentioned as basic to his thinking, and that is the crucial element of choice in the unfolding human drama. As he liked to point out, the very act of refusing to make a choice is itself a choice.

His publications reveal a wide spectrum of interest and knowledge. The earliest was his Ph.D. dissertation, also printed separately, a study of the influence of the Irish poet and Theosophist, "AE," which he went to England to research and write. Later works include: *The Golden Hoard* (a series of essays in Comparative Religion), *Great Images* (biographical essays on outstanding achievers), *The Delightful Art of Writing, Symbol and Fantasy* (drama and poetry), *The Face of Loneliness, A Search for Identity* (psychology), and *The Path of the Fiery Rainbow*.

There are several unpublished works, most of them written during his recent years of retirement. They include, in addition to *Arcane Stories*, a collection of poems, *Bestriding Pegasus*; two companion volumes, *Metaphysical Psychology* and *A Course in Metaphysical Counseling; The Lighted Way*; and *The Messenger and His Treasure*.

I am deeply appreciative of Fellowship in Prayer's decision to publish the *Arcane Stories* because, in addition to my personal delight in these tales, my husband considered them especially meaningful as a symbolic presentation of truth in narrative form, within a brief compass. It was a form that intrigued him. At first, he wondered if he would have enough ideas to create a series of stories. Then, after completing the original set, he became aware of additional possibilities, which he wrote up, one by one, as they occurred to him. During the next several months, a second series evolved. The process continued, along with other literary projects, and in the course of another year or so, a third series was created. So congenial did he find this form that he continued to write them occasionally, almost to the time of his death. Each story can—and should be—individually savored; yet every reader will find his own group of favorites within the collection.

My husband took very seriously his long association with Fellowship in Prayer, both as contributing author and as Trustee. He always believed strongly in its service potential in a sadly divided world and found Carl Evans' ecumenical vision of "A World United in Prayer" most meaningful and appealing. The power of prayer was very real to him, and so he devoted himself

to expressing his ideas on this subject at various times, most notably in shaping the Fellowship's Course in Prayer, presented several years ago. Just last year he was moved to write a series of articles on various world religions and philosophies, in each instance striving to present a fresh approach and an additional dimension of meaning to familiar ideas, and to illustrate, in a special way, the Scriptural ideal, "That they all may be one." It is this series that Fellowship in Prayer is publishing in its current issues, a decision by Paul Griffith that my husband especially appreciated.

Francis Merchant's view of humanity was a subtle blend of idealism, a realism that recognized the cross-grained quality in human nature co-existing with the divine, and a wry sense of humor that was an enormous aid in maintaining a balanced perspective. He did not underestimate the difficulty of the task facing the human race as it strains to press forward into greater light. His personality at times reflected the urgency he sensed about the crisis of our times and his convictions about the strenuous spiritual efforts necessary to save the future for humanity. As he wrote in his brief poem, "Task":

We fight for light
By day and night,
Forever strive
To keep alive
The spirit's glow
Midst ebb and flow
Of that great dance
Called circumstance.

Above all, he had an utterly unshakable conviction of the high and glorious spiritual destiny of humanity, united in the bonds of brotherhood under the fatherhood of God. This spirit of the divine warrior in his nature shines through every line of one of his last poems, "Quest":

Nor fog nor mist
Make us desist,
Nor fortune's slings
Can clip our wings,
Nor do we quail
Or fear to fail;
In such a test
The quest is blessed.

The beauty of his life may indeed be summed up in his own words:

I have not lost faith,
And that, in truth,
Is my victory.

The soul speaks in symbols and parables, but who shall interpret her speech?

Arcane Stories

1. THE SHELL OF A SNAIL

A naturalist who had in some way learned the art of conversing with animals was once sitting on a rock on the shore of a river when he caught sight of a snail. He watched its slow, laborious movements for some time. Finally he spoke.

"It seems to me, O Snail," he said gently, "that you are not making much progress."

The Snail paused, ruminated for a moment, and replied, "I am as content with my progress as you are with yours."

"Your shell, I should think," the man went on, "is a great impediment."

"Not at all," said the Snail. "I can curl up very comfortably in it. In fact, I think it's more snug and agreeable than the houses men choose to live in. When danger threatens, it offers a fine refuge—and it's always available."

"I agree with you that it's rent-free and secure, but what would happen if you got rid of it?"

The Snail was shocked. "Get rid of it, indeed. Why, what would my ancestors think?"

"I don't suppose they would think anything, for they have long since vanished from the face of the Earth."

"I have used this shell so long," said the crawling creature, "that I have come to believe it is an inalienable part of me."

"But it isn't, is it?" the naturalist queried.

"I'd lose my identity if I gave it up," the Snail responded. "What would happen to my sense of security?"

"Maybe you could learn to leap or fly," the man suggested. "if you don't try, you'll never find out."

"I don't see much advantage in leaping or flying," the Snail commented. "All I want to do is eat, bask in the sun, and feel secure. What's wrong with that?"

"I am quite aware that many human beings are of the same opinion," the naturalist reflected, "but wouldn't it be nice if you could travel and see more of the world?"

"Inasmuch as you are suggesting ways in which I should change," the Snail replied, "let me give you a piece of advice. I think men would be better off if they imitated snails and curled up in a comfortable, cozy shell instead of running wild over the face of the Earth and fighting with each other so much of the time. A snail's life is safe, slow, and deliberate. Whenever we don't like something, we crawl into the shell and stay there until we have recovered our equilibrium. It seems to me that men have more to learn from snails than snails from men."

So saying, the snail crawled over the ledge of the rock and was soon out of sight.

2. DEFINING WHAT IS WANTED

A group of devotees spent long days in prayer and fasting, hoping that their devotion and austerities would cause the Angel Gabriel to manifest. How long they continued their supplications no one knows, but eventually their prayers were answered. Shining resplendently, the angel appeared.

There was a long pause during which perfect silence reigned.

Finally the Angel spoke.

"What do you want me to tell you?" he asked.

"Everything," said one of the devotees.

"That is an unreasonable request, impossible of fulfillment," the Angel said—and vanished.

Undaunted, the devotees continued their devotions until the Angel appeared again.

"What do you want me to tell you?"

After a pause, one of the suppliants said, "Nothing."

"If I am supposed to communicate nothing," the Angel declared, "there is no need for my presence." So saying, he de-materialized.

Even though the band of devotees were disappointed, they continued to persist.

For a third time the Angel appeared in their midst and asked the same question.

No one said anything.

"Answers can only come from questions," the Angel declared. "Your silence indicates to me that the cups of your desire cannot be filled with words."

And then it faded from view.

3. THE BOOK OF ANSWERS

A gardener who lived a hard life, working from dawn to sunset, bemoaned his lot. Why were his days filled with unceasing toil while others enjoyed the good things of life? Why was his lot so unrewarding?

One day a scholar passed by and chanced to hear him complaining.

"The answers to your complaints can be readily found," said the scholar.

"How can that be?" the gardener asked.

"They may all be found in a book."

"Where can I find it and what is its title?" the gardener inquired.

"It is a very large volume called *The Book of Answers*, that is part of the *Book of Life*," said the scholar, "but you will have to discover the publisher yourself."

The gardener thought about this conversation for a long time. With the years his problems became over more burdensome and unendurable. One day he decided to give up gardening and to spend his days searching for *The Book of Answers*.

For many years he wandered from place to place. Everywhere he inquired about *The Book of Answers*, but no one seemed to be able to tell him where it might be found.

At long last he came upon a hermit, who told him that the book had been stored in a certain monastery. The seeker hastened to the designated place.

The abbot of the monastery was very obliging and conducted him to the alcove where the previous book occupied a central position on a large table.

With trembling hands the former gardener opened the pages. To his dismay, he found that he couldn't read the book. As he leafed through it, he discovered that he could not grasp the meanings that the words and hieroglyphics conveyed.

Troubled in mind, he went to the abbot and explained his dilemma.

"I understand your predicament," said the abbot. "*The Book of Answers* is indeed rather difficult to understand unless you have first studied the *Book of Meanings*."

"*The Book of Meanings*?" queried the former gardener.

"Quite right," said the abbot. "And before that you must be well versed in the *Book of Questions*."

The gardener was becoming more bewildered by the moment. "How long do you think it would take to understand the two introductory books?"

"That depends," the abbot replied. "Some people become so fascinated by the *Book of Questions* that they never get to the *Book of Answers*. As to the *Book of Meanings*, it is the source of endless debate, but then, some persons would much rather dispute about answers than find them."

The former gardener viewed his prospects with apprehension. "Isn't there something I can do here while I go through these books?"

"We have need of a gardener here," the abbot replied. "If you are skilled in that field, we can use your services."

And so the gardener returned to the work that he had originally found onerous and unrewarding.

4. THE REPINING CANDLE

A fine wax candle that had been stored in a box with many of its brethren complained that it was being condemned to an unproductive life of enforced leisure.

"What good is a candle if it doesn't burn?" it cried. "Isn't that what I was made for?"

"Your turn will come," comforted a stately ornamental candle nearby.

In due time the candle was taken from the box, placed in an elaborate holder, and its wick was set aflame.

Now the candle was satisfied. Its unflickering light penetrated into the dark corners of the room and could be seen through the window at quite a distance.

After a time the candle noticed that it was decreasing in size, even though its flame remained as bright as ever.

"What will happen to me?" exclaimed the candle when it had made this discovery. "Moment by moment I am growing smaller. Now trees don't have this problem. They grow consistently larger. Why should I be rewarded for my enlightening services by forfeiting my very substance?"

At this point the ornamental candle spoke up. "Why are you so fearful? Can't you see that you have been transformed into light? Even human beings don't often achieve this. The light that goes out on this plane becomes radiance elsewhere. All of us must burn, but whether it be on an altar or in a humble hut, we are all prophets preaching that the time of darkness will end."

5. HOARDING TRUTH

A certain young man was traveling through a desolate forest when he came upon a hermit seated in meditation.

His curiosity aroused, the young man waited respectfully till the other had completed his devotions and then began to converse with him.

"Why have you left the haunts of men to live in this place of solitude?" asked the young man.

"Because of the truth," replied the other.

"The truth? How could it persuade you to forsake society?"

"When I was young," said the hermit, "I told people too much of the truth and so did them harm."

"How can that be?" exclaimed the young man. "Doesn't everybody want the truth? How could you harm others by being truthful?"

"The human race can't stand very much truth," the hermit replied. "I told them that they were frittering away their lives on trivialities, living in a manner that would hardly do credit to animals—and they disliked intensely what I said."

How much truth do you think human beings can stand?" the young man wondered.

"One-sixth of the true to five-sixths adulteration," the hermit declared. "Whenever I altered this proportion, I gave offense."

"And so truth made a hermit out of you," the young man said.

"It's a precious commodity, I decided, and should be hoarded just as men hoard gold and precious stones. Too much of it might prove destructive to the human race in its present condition."

"Do you think, then, that it is necessary to lie to people in order to save them from themselves?"

"Nature conceals her jewels," responded the hermit. "We live in a world of energies, but we are deluded into believing that only matter exists. We are encompassed by lies. The universe is one, but we see it as many."

"Such truths could indeed be shattering," the young man agreed, "and you will find few human beings who care to hear them. To whom can you speak of such matters?"

"I hold converse with the stars," the hermit replied. "They honor greatly the chalice of undefiled truth."

6. GOD'S WILL

A student who frequented libraries and read many books came ever and anon on the phrase, "God's will." Whenever he attended church and heard a sermon, this concept was bound to be mentioned. Strangely enough, few people could define what it meant. Everything that happened was supposed to refer to it.

The student puzzled over this matter for some time and finally decided to consult various persons of repute who might shed light on this subject. He went to ministers, doctors, scholars, professors, and politicians, but no one seemed able to satisfy him. They always became elusive and vague when they were asked for a precise definition.

Finally the student came upon a lawyer who thought about the matter, as lawyers do, in legal terms.

"God's will, said the lawyer, "why, it must be a document registered in the Hall of Records. Of course, I don't remember ever having read such a will, but so many people have referred to it that it must exist somewhere."

"Could you find it for me?" the student asked.

"I'll try," said the lawyer, and he was as good as his word. Some time later he visited the student and waved an ancient, time-yellowed parchment in the air.

"I told a learned judge about the matter," the lawyer said, "and he instituted an exhaustive search. At last someone found this document. Here it is."

The young man took it eagerly in his hands and started reading.

"I hereby devise and bequeath to the whole human family, to have and to hold," the document averred, "the vast Earth with all its mountains, rivers, plains, continents, and oceans, as well as the background scenery of the sun, moon, and stars. Further, I bequeath the green meadows to the children of the world in which they may play. Also, I grant each human being the gift of time, lasting from birth to death, in which to enjoy life. All this do I devise and bequeath to the end that everyone born on the face of the Earth may, by the right use of this inheritance, establish a permanent claim to an even more munificent divine inheritance."

Signed, The Maker

The student found the document intriguing. "How is it," he wondered, "that this will is unknown and has been hidden away in the archives for untold centuries? Shouldn't it be spread abroad so that everyone might claim his inheritance?"

The lawyer was dubious. "You will note," he said, cocking his head as canny lawyers do, "that this undated will has not been probated. Furthermore, no witnesses have attested to the legality of this instrument. Moreover, the statute of limitations no doubt invalidates it. Again, it would upset so many of our established institutions that the High Court would refuse to accept any case growing out of it."

Sorrowingly and wonderingly, the student turned away.

7. THE PIANO MAKER

A maker of pianos worked diligently from morning until night, assembling the materials for his musical instruments. All day long sounds of various kinds came forth from his workshop.

A sage was accustomed to pass this factory whenever he took his daily walk. He listened to the different-pitched sounds with interest and pondered their meaning.

Finally the sage went to see the piano maker.

"Both of us," said the sage, "are interested in creating music."

"I make my living by producing pianos," said the other, "but I do not understand your interest."

"You arrange material objects so that they give forth music," explained the sage, "while I try to attune human beings to do the same. In certain ways, I must admit, you are more successful than I, for human beings are not as predictable as strings and sounding boards."

"But strings are very sensitive," the piano maker ventured. "They change pitch with the weather."

"A delicate thought can affect the pulse beat of a human being," countered the sage.

"Yes, but a piano requires a performer and a composition. This does not seem to be so in human beings."

"Not in an obvious way," said the sage, "but there is an analogy. The bodily mechanism is touched by the soul in accordance with a greater composition than any pianist has ever played."

"Not everyone knows how to play," observed the piano maker. "The instrument may be marvelous, but that means nothing to the untrained player."

"Quite right," responded the sage. "Some people never learn to play their instrument; others know how to play, but the strings are not in tune; and again, some can't find an appropriate composition to play."

"These speculations are too complicated for me," said the piano maker. "I just want to sell pianos to make a living."

"I see," said the sage. "You are interested in the profit, and I am interested in the song. Musical notes differ from bank-notes. You are concerned that people should buy, while I am interested in the universal rhythms that keep the Earth dancing in space as it compasses the sun and proclaims the glory of God."

8. THE NEW OPTOMETRY

A scholar paused at a shop on a busy street, eyeing a large sign with the word *Optometrist* on it. He opened the door, went in, and saw a shrewd-faced man behind the counter.

"What can I do for you?" the shopkeeper asked.

"I've been reading a good deal lately," said the scholar, "and I fear that I have strained my eyes somewhat. Can you give me a test to find out whether I need glasses to correct my vision?"

"In the past we used to correct vision," the optometrist replied, "but now we alter it."

"What is the difference?"

"I can see that you haven't kept up with the times," said the shopkeeper briskly. "We used to provide people with spectacles so that they might see what is set before them, but now we fit them out with lenses that show them, not what is there, but what they would like to behold. It's much better that way, I can assure you."

"I'm interested in seeing objects as they are," retorted the scholar, a bit annoyed, "not what I'd like to see."

"Ah, but you're wrong," said the shopkeeper, shaking his head sadly. "You're missing most of the joys of living."

"How is that?"

“What you would like to believe is so much more satisfying and agreeable than the bare reality. For example, a man came to me this morning and said he was becoming disturbed by the wrinkles that were increasingly apparent in his wife’s face. I gave him lenses that screen out the wrinkles so that he won’t see them. What is the result? Now he is a happy man. Last week a business man came to me who was having indigestion whenever he watched television programs. The spectacles I prescribed changed the situation completely and he can now watch television day and night, yet remain merry and light-hearted.”

“That may be,” exclaimed the scholar, “but I don’t want my vision altered. I want to see reality as it is.”

“Why oppose progress?” queried the shopkeeper. “We can make the ugly appear beautiful, the reprehensible praiseworthy, the disagreeable pleasing. Many of my customers have assured me that they would have had nervous breakdowns, if we hadn’t adjusted their vision. Mental patients in hospitals by the thousands have been set free shortly after they put on the new kind of spectacles. If that isn’t progress, then I don’t understand what it is.”

“Look here,” cried the scholar a bit impatiently, “I’d like to have old-fashioned glasses that will enable me to see the world as it is.”

“Then I must tell you,” returned the shopkeeper, his voice rising, “that you are out of tune with the times. We serve thousands of people here, and you are the only person who has found reason to object to our standardized procedures.”

“Do I understand, then, that you refuse to serve me?” the scholar demanded to know.

“Not at all, sir,” replied the shopkeeper. “You are asking for something that has gone out of style, and we no longer carry the line of spectacles on which you insist. In fact, we would lose money if we did.”

The scholar was silent for a moment. “If I’m the only person who wants to see reality,” he said slowly, “the world must be in a sorry mess.”

“You are sadly mistaken,” the shopkeeper declared. “The world is happy, and you are sad. With the proper spectacles you would see everything in a different light. Come, now, won’t you let me prescribe for you?”

“No, thanks,” said the scholar shortly as he strode decisively out of the shop.

9. HOW MANY DAYS HAVE YOU LIVED?

When prospective disciples came to a sage, he made it a point to ask them, “How many days have you lived?”

The answers to this question were varied.

Some disciples, taking the query literally, began to compute the number of days between their birth and the present moment.

When they submitted their calculations to the sage, he would comment, “I see arithmetical figures on a piece of paper, but certainly not days.”

Others placed the emphasis on the word *lived*, that is, on periods of inner realization.

With this reply the sage was better pleased, but he would comment, "Many flowers are tied together by one string to make a single bouquet."

One day a disciple came who, when asked the prescribed question, made no reply, but went home and meditated on the matter for a long time.

Finally he appeared before the sage and gave an unusual answer.

"One day," said the disciple.

"How so?" asked the sage.

"We live one day at a time, never more. After the first, there is only repetition. Yesterday is a shadow, tomorrow a hope. The present moment only is ours for action. The past is summed up in the present, and the future is the outflowing of the now. Progress is always one step at a time. One person lives many days, but the multiple days are related to one individual. That oneness holds a secret. Time is threefold, but man is a unity experiencing a unity."

The sage smiled.

10. THE WEIGHT OF IGNORANCE

The Prime Minister of a state received a report that ignorance was increasing, and it disturbed him.

In order to find out the truth, he asked a noted scientist to investigate the matter and to measure the amount of ignorance in the state.

Within a year the scientist's findings were on his desk, but they were very discouraging.

"After due investigation," wrote the scientist, "I have concluded that ignorance is spreading at a rapid rate. While it is difficult to measure the precise amount that is presently oppressing the country, I shall try to state the case in non-mathematical terms. The amount of ignorance prevalent in society would fill all the five oceans, and the weight of it exceeds that of all the mountains in the world."

The Prime Minister was greatly perturbed. Every year more and more money was appropriated for education. Schoolhouses had sprung up in profusion all over the country—and yet, despite all this activity, ignorance was increasing.

"We must do something about this," he said to himself.

Thereupon he called in the Minister of Education.

"I was just about to tell you," the Minister of Education began, "that we need much more money for schools and teachers."

"Just a minute," the Prime Minister interposed. "Before we come to that, there is a most serious matter we have to discuss. I have here a report by a notable scientist," and he waved it in the air, "that ignorance is increasing by leaps and bounds. Do you know anything about this matter?"

The Minister of Education stroked his chin. "It can't be. An enemy of the state is no doubt circulating such propaganda. Of course, it all depends on how you define ignorance. I have always contended that ignorance decreases in exact proportion to the money allocated to my department."

"I want you to conduct an investigation into this situation," the Prime Minister declared. "In two months' time bring me the results."

The Minister of Education did as he was told. He looked into the matter thoroughly, and what he discovered gave him much cause for thought. At the end of the allotted time, he appeared before the Prime Minister to share the results of his investigations.

"Well, now," said the Prime Minister, "how does the matter stand? Is ignorance increasing or diminishing?"

"It's this way," the Minister of Education explained, wrinkling his forehead to show how seriously he regarded the problem. "Everything depends on the yardstick you use. I must admit that ignorance in the ordinary or vulgar sense of the word has increased. However, let us be philosophical. Wisdom arises out of ignorance. I think any logical person will agree to that. This means, then, that ignorance is really a part of wisdom, for the latter comes from the former."

The Prime Minister pondered the argument.

"Besides," added the Minister of Education shrewdly, "tampering with ignorance could be dangerous. How would our officials be elected if the proportion of ignorance were too greatly disturbed? The pillars of society might topple."

The Prime Minister thought the matter over and decided to consign the scientist's report on the spread of ignorance to a file, where it has been gathering dust ever since.

11. THE MIRROR OF MENDED MISTAKES

At a meeting of psychiatrists, an inventor delivered a striking address.

"I have observed," he declared, "that innumerable people suffer when they contemplate their past mistakes. The wrongs they have done weigh heavily on their consciences and burden their minds. They are plagued by worries and tormented by the wrongs they have done to others. Some of them, in consequence, have nervous breakdowns; others take to drink or drugs in order to forget.

"In view of all this, I have invented a new kind of mirror. It is attached to a computer. When the relevant information is presented, the mirror corrects any mistake that a person may have made. It mends his faults and shows that he was always right in everything he ever did. Theft becomes a matter of redistributing the wealth of the nation; crimes, a means of redressing wrongs; hypocrisy, as subtle diplomacy, and so on.

"Many people who have used my special mirror have expressed much

gratitude to me for pacifying their minds and easing their consciences. They thank me profusely for restoring them to normality and taking from them the onerous burdens they have been bearing for so long. A good many people who couldn't live with themselves—including politicians, hardened criminals, and bribetaking judges—have expressed their pleasure at being relieved of the revulsion they have felt for their own iniquities.

"The prospect that now opens up for us is bright indeed. Clergymen have preached against sin for many generations but to little avail, but we can rid the country of this evil simply by justifying it."

The psychiatrists who heard the inventor and tested the mirror were deeply impressed. They voted to submit his name to the Board of Awards that confers special prizes on those who have made the most notable contributions to the progress of mankind.

In his own home, however, the inventor faced a different problem. His wife, who was a shrew and had begun to feel remorse for her vicious nature, after looking into the mirror, berated him with ever increasing acerbity—so that he began to wonder whether he should patent his great invention.

12. THE GREATER LIBRARY

A metaphysician who had spent many years in study entered a library and pondered the vast array of books displayed on the shelves. He was paging through a large volume when the chief librarian chanced to pass and asked him whether he had found what he was looking for.

"You have books here," said the metaphysician, "but no authors."

"Why, every book has an author," the chief librarian replied.

"Yes, but although their works are here, they themselves are elsewhere."

"Of course," responded the chief librarian. "A library contains the precipitated thoughts of great minds."

"Suppose I can't read," the metaphysician conjectured. "What value will these books have for me then?"

"None at all," replied the other. "Unless you can read, the treasury of books will be closed to you."

"Suppose that I know much about foreign languages but nothing about English?"

"The thoughts congealed in these books would be equally incomprehensible to you."

"Let's enlarge on your assertions," suggested the metaphysician. "The entire Earth is the great library of the Creator. It contains mountains, oceans, continents. These are the equivalent of books. To read these volumes aright, we must know something of the language in which they were written. Man's language is but the symbol or the shadow of a far greater kind of utterance."

The chief librarian nodded. "The larger library of which you speak has been with us from the beginning."

"To be sure," declared the metaphysician, "but we still haven't learned the higher language in which the vast creation addresses us. The author is, for many, anonymous."

"We don't seem to have an alphabet for that tongue," the chief librarian observed.

"The four kingdoms of nature are the first four letters," the metaphysician answered. "The fifth is the stars. Again, each man is a letter, and all together they spell out the divine intent."

The chief librarian shook his head. "It will be a long time before human beings comprehend the words of that sublime book and get in touch with that author."

13. THE CATALOG OF DIFFERENCES

A certain teacher was in the habit of asking his disciples the following questions:

What is the difference between a xylophone and a human being?

What is the difference between a stone and a human being?

What is the difference between a rose petal and a human being?

He called the meditation based on these questions the Catalog of Differences.

Many of his disciples had difficulties in arriving at meaningful conclusions.

If they failed to return with perceptive answers, he would become more specific.

What happens if you strike a xylophone with a mallet?

What happens if you deal a glancing blow to a stone?

What happens if you grind a rose petal into bits?

The answers to these questions are less difficult.

The xylophone, when struck, emits a melodious tone.

The stone, when dealt a sharp blow, gives forth a spark.

A rose petal, when ground, yields delicate perfume.

Now, then, what happens when you strike a man?

Another perspective may be gained by a few additional observations.

A cow, without being asked, gives milk.

An apple tree, without being asked, yields fruit.

A rose, without being asked, spreads perfume on the air.

What does a man do without being asked?

14. PASSAGE OF A BIRD

A scholar was once asked to elaborate on the theme, "A bird leaves no

trace of its passage through the air.”

His exposition of this theme follows.

A bird moves from place to place, yet leaves no tracks. No matter how many times it wings from one tree to another, there is no telltale evidence of its repeated flights.

This is not true of man or beast. A donkey, for example, will leave a trail where its hoofs have struck the ground. Where many men have walked, a worn path appears.

There are no roads in the air, but there are many on Earth. Man uses his feet in walking from one place to another, but a bird uses wings. There are no obstructions in the air, but on Earth the traveler must often move circuitously to avoid obstacles.

Can a man imitate a bird? Physically, to be sure, he cannot. Metaphysically speaking, however, we may give thought to an imaginative comparison. The world of the mind has often been spoken of as an airy domain. A movement in thought is not perceptible to the senses. The wings of man consist of his imagination and aspirations. How high he can fly depends entirely on the use he makes of these faculties. An eagle soars higher than a wren.

The spiritual path is more airy than earthy; hence, it is not easily seen.

Men leave footprints on the sands of time, but birds, at most, drop a feather now and then. The sage, like the bird, moves on undiscernible pathways, and leaves behind mayhap a written record, like a feather, of his experiences. The goals of men, generally speaking, are material and pertain to the Earth, but that of the sage is airy, composed of impalpable essences and delicate fragrances.

The ordinary man is inclined to grapple belligerently with Death before quitting the earthly scene. The sage evaporates into the airy essences he has come to cherish. He leaves no trace.

15. THE CHESS BOARD

Two men were playing chess and sat hunched over the board hour after hour. At length they grew weary. One of the players became so exhausted that he began to doze. In this condition, he was somewhat startled to hear the chess pieces talking with one another.

“I grow a little tired,” said a pawn to his fellow, “of being moved about on this board like an automaton. It’s an infringement of my freedom of choice.”

“What bothers me,” responded the other, “is that nothing is ever settled. The antagonists struggle hard to win, but when the game is ended, the players start all over again.”

“I never could understand,” interposed a third, “what they think they’ve won when they capture a few pieces of wood, and beleaguer a wooden king.”

A knight had overheard this conversation, and he contributed his thought.

"I don't think the players know what else to do with their lives than to play make-believe games that are of no consequence to anyone."

"It's too bad that our roles aren't reversed," said a nearby bishop. "If they were wooden figures and we were men, we'd put them to better use, don't you think?"

"They're always trying to win something," vouchsafed the first pawn, "but when they do, what have they got—at most, a temporary satisfaction."

At this point the dozing player awoke and found that he had lost the game.

16. A SCARECROW'S PROFESSION

A scientist used electronic equipment with great ingenuity in discovering what goes on in the head of a scarecrow. It had been assumed that it was devoid of all feeling and intellectual capacity, but this is not so. The scientist was even able to question the scarecrow and record its answers.

"How does it feel to be a scarecrow?" the scientist asked.

"Not much different from what it feels like to be a human being," the scarecrow replied.

"Does it trouble you to stand day and night in the cornfield in fair and foul weather?"

"I enjoy my profession very much," the scarecrow explained. "I don't have to think too much, for I know exactly what I have to do. Sunshine and rain, biting winds and pelting hail, they are all one to me. My wants are few. I live the simple life. Flapping in the wind is enough for me."

"Doesn't it bother you that you have no soul?"

"I don't see much difference between myself and people who do. If they aren't troubled by having a soul, why should I be because I have none?"

"Don't you have any ambition?" the scientist probed.

"Not a bit," replied the scarecrow. "People go about their business, and I go about mine. What they achieve I don't know, but I, at least, scare away the birds."

"Schools have been established all over the world to humanize scarecrows," the scientist asserted. "Do you approve of this movement?"

"No," the other returned. "Much harm could come to scarecrows in this way."

"How so?"

"Scarecrows are harmless; human beings are not. Scarecrows have no wants; human beings have many."

"If you could, by some scientific method, be transformed into a human being, would you look forward to such a metamorphosis?"

"What! And give up my profession and traditional ways?" the scarecrow exclaimed. "Never."

17. THE WORLD OF IF

A young man acquired an interesting technique by means of which he could avoid all disagreeable effort. When it was suggested that he ought to develop faith, hope, and charity, he reformulated the suggestions in the following manner:

If I acquired more faith, how would people react to me?

If I developed more hope, would I be more persuasive in speech?

If I gave more to charity, would the recipients appreciate my help?

Then he pondered on these questions at length and got lost in his speculations. He found it an excellent way of accepting suggestions without really doing anything about them.

"The world of *if*," he said, "is a very pleasant one. In this domain the hardest problems are readily solved, the greatest burdens easily lifted. Everything is possible and the most onerous task achievable."

Learned books have been written that hinge entirely on an *if*. This two-letter word can alter the shape of an argument. "Be ye perfect" becomes, "If we were perfect, wouldn't life be monotonous?" "Get wisdom," becomes, "If I achieved wisdom, how would I be able to take care of my affairs?" "Be good" becomes, "If I were good, how many pleasures would I have to give up?"

The young man's teacher, observing this tendency, asked him to consider the following question: If you took leave of your senses, how would we notice the difference? If the word *if* were eliminated from the language, how would you get on?

18. THE KETTLE PHILOSOPHY

In the kitchen, at night, long after everyone has retired, strange conversations take place.

The faucet (or tap) boasts, "I control the water supply in this house. Everything depends on me."

"But what good is water," cries a tall glass, "if there is no container? A form is needed so that the water can be properly stored. That's my function."

A tea kettle overhears this conversation.

"You channel and store the water," says the kettle, "but I transform it. I convert it into a vapor that pervades the atmosphere. I teach water, which normally flows downward, to rise. Many educators never succeed in doing that."

The fire, which makes the tea kettle's transformational activity possible, remains silent.

19. QUESTIONS: POINTLESS AND POINTED

A proper question and a pertinent answer may be compared to a lock and the key that fits it. The one is directly related to the other. The wrong question will not yield the right answer. Knowing how to present a problem is already part of the solution.

It may not be amiss, then, to consider a few questions of doubtful use and relevancy.

How can you distinguish the shadow of a black pail at night?

How many blades of grass grow on the village green?

How many fools are equal to one wise man?

If words were flowers, where would they grow?

If time had weight, how much would a year weigh?

If wishes were horses, could they be taxed?

Such questions, together with their answers, may not yield much profit to those who speculate on them, but there are others of a metaphysical nature that are rewarding. Let us consider a few of them.

What is the light of which all light as we know it is the shadow?

To what extent is man the effect of a cause and also, the cause of effects?

Gardens and rainbows belong to Nature—but in what sense can they manifest in human nature?

20. ANIMAL ETHICS

A chicken and a pig once overheard the owner of the farm say that they were scheduled to be slaughtered in a fortnight. Realizing that this was an infringement of their right to live, they hastily convened a meeting of the animals to discuss their grievances against man.

At a specified time they came together to voice their complaints.

“Just think of it,” said a sizable pig, “they’re fattening me so that it will be profitable to sell me to a butcher. My destiny is to have my carcass served as food for human beings. Out of me they will make bacon, pork chops, pigs’ feet, and ham. What have I done to deserve such a fate? Guests at dinner will smack their lips and express more satisfaction with my mortal remains than they ever did with my living self. It would seem that I am more valuable dead than alive. Is that fair treatment, I ask you?”

“If anybody ever had a just cause,” gobbled an imposing turkey, “you do. But think for a moment about my fate. I have become part of a ceremony called Thanksgiving. People say they are giving thanks to the Creator by eating me. While chewing on my body, they make speeches expressing appreciation for the bounty granted to them. Digesting me in their stomachs seems to set their tongues wagging with thanks. I’d feel better if they would at least apologize for eating my carcass, but to make it part of a festival of thanksgiving is, to my

way of thinking, distinctly hypocritical.”

A cow was the next to be heard.

“All my life I give milk free of charge to the human race,” mourned the animal, “and how am I repaid? I am slaughtered and my body is carved up into sirloin, porterhouse, and round steaks. I don’t mind giving free milk to human beings, but it’s most undignified to have one’s body dismembered so that it might gorge their gullets.”

At this, all the animals cheered. They passed a resolution that a petition should be delivered to representatives of the human race asking for the redress of just grievances.

A crow extracted a feather from its body with its beak and wrote: “We, your lesser brothers, the members of the Animal Kingdom, do hereby protest against the traditional practice of human beings to slaughter and eat our kind. Inasmuch as the bountiful Earth provides vast quantities of fruits, grains, and vegetables for all, we cannot understand why the practice of cannibalism should not cease forthwith. If cows, sheep, and pigs are able to discipline themselves not to eat human beings, why should not human beings act in the same enlightened manner?”

(Signed)

The Animal Kingdom

Whether anything ever came of this humane declaration, I have never discovered.

21. THE IRRADIATED VASE

A potter who made exquisite vases of various kinds returned to his shop at night with a friend. The moon was at the full, and its beams fell upon the potter’s work with telling effect.

“How beautiful those vases are, shimmering in the moonlight,” his friend observed.

The potter shook his head. “By themselves, the vases provide but a form. It is the moonlight shining through the sides of the vessels that creates the striking effect. The form gains value from the light that illuminates it.”

“Perhaps the Earth itself is a vase moving about the sun,” the friend speculated.

“The Earth is a form,” the potter agreed, “but the light that illuminates it is the source of its beauty and the promise of its destiny.”

“May we not regard man himself as a vessel whose meaning is to be found in the lights—of devotion, reason, and love—that irradiate it?”

“There could be yet another interpretation,” the potter added.

“And what is that?” asked his friend.

“Mayhap all religions are vases into which the moonbeams of truth are graciously poured. Many are the vases, but the light that shines through them all is the same.”

22. MOUNTAIN TALK

Human speech arises from human needs, but the mountains communicate with each other after their own fashion. A seismologist who accidentally discovered their way of addressing each other has recorded for us a conversation that took place some time ago between Mount Shasta in California and Mount Rainier in Washington. The government had kept this matter secret, but relented when told that the suppression of truth is very unwise and not in the national interest.

"Friend," said Mount Shasta, "I don't think we've spoken in the last twenty-five years."

"I suppose it has been that long," observed Mt. Rainier, "I get so wrapped up in contemplating the stars that I forget about time."

"It's nicer looking up," replied Mt. Shasta, "but at times I look downward, and if I had a head, I'd shake it."

"I know just what you mean," Mt. Rainier agreed. "Those people down there don't seem to know what life is all about. They've looked at us for centuries and don't even know that we have a symbolic value."

"I have tried to tell them again and again that we're masses of rock reaching upward from Earth to high heaven, from the depths to the heights, but they're very obtuse when it comes to mountain language."

"All they derive from the concept of the summit is a conference," Mt. Rainier shared. "They don't seem to understand that there are summits in their own lives that they should be striving to reach."

"We sit here in peace and quiet, enjoying the wonder of the creation," Mt. Shasta commented, "but they get more feverish, restless, and violent with every generation. It's a pity they don't understand that we're telling them aspiration is a way of life, fitting not only for a mountain but for a human being."

"I must confess that I have often wondered whether they will ever learn," Mt. Rainier declared. "Every spring I send them messages in the form of torrents that pour down my sides, fertilize the fields of the plains, and move onward to be merged in the sea. Symbolically speaking, human beings ought to do likewise, but they're unaccustomed to the reflection and meditation that we consider indispensable."

"We mountains," responded Mt. Shasta, "are the unacknowledged teachers of the human race, but very regrettably, they haven't found it out."

"Quite true," Mount Rainier said, "we have much to give, but. . ."

At this point a growling thunderstorm made it impossible to hear the rest of the conversation.

23. THE ACCIDENTAL KNIFE

As I sat down to dinner one day, I noticed a large knife on the table. After

saying grace, I heard a small, squeaky voice and discovered that it came from the knife.

"Were you addressing me?" I inquired.

"Naturally," said the knife. "I asked you what I was doing here."

"That's what a lot of people would like to know," I commented. "You were brought here by destiny."

"Nonsense," said the knife. "There is no such thing."

"Well, then," I asked, "what's your history?"

"I was born on the side of a mountain in the earth. Huge derricks dragged me away and brought me to a refinery. There I was thrown into a furnace and purged. Then I was shaped into a knife and put on display in a cutlery store. Finally, you bought me, and here I am."

"Wasn't it all done with a purpose?" I questioned. "Don't you see that it was all a matter of destiny?"

"Destiny, balderdash," said the knife. "It's all accidental."

"Well, why do you think you were put into the furnace?" I countered.

"It just happened that way," he replied. "I could just as well have been thrown into a dust heap."

24. THE SQUARE THAT WANTED TO BE A CIRCLE

A certain wheelwright cut a square piece of wood but found no use for it and set it in a dark corner. There it remained day after day, watching the wheels roll off the assembly line. The circular motion of the craftsman's creations never failed to impress the onlooking square.

"If only I could move with such agility and grace," the square said to itself. "How wonderful it would be to glide through life so smoothly and harmoniously."

Now and again the square tried to move like a wheel, but soon gave up the attempt.

One night, when all was quiet in the workshop, the square mustered up enough courage to speak about its circular ambitions to a nearby wheel.

"Is there some secret that enables you to glide so gracefully over the floor?" the square wanted to know.

"Not in the least," the wheel returned. "It's simply the most natural form of locomotion for me. However, if you'd really like to learn the art, why don't you ask the master wheelwright about it? I'm sure he could help you."

The square brooded on the matter and finally followed this advice. It waited until the master was resting from work and having a cup of coffee, and then rather timidly spoke up.

"Master wheelwright," said the square respectfully, "why am I rooted to the ground, unable to move circularly like your other creations?"

The master wheelwright was, as you might well imagine, rather surprised to be addressed in this manner by a wooden square, but as soon as he recovered

from his astonishment, he considered the matter.

"If you were a circle instead of a square," he said, "you would be able to turn about. As long as you remain a square, you can't."

This information was very disturbing to the square. "Do you mean to say, then, that there is no hope for me? Must I forever be content to remain rooted in one spot with no means of locomotion?"

The master wheelwright pondered the matter. "I think I can help you," he said finally, "but I'll have to cut off a part of you."

"Oh, oh," cried the square, "is that really necessary?"

"It's the only way," the wheelwright declared. "I'll saw off your edges and make a circle out of you. Then you'll be able to glide about just like the wheels."

Reluctantly the square consented.

The wheelwright set to work and sawed off the four sides so that the square was transformed into a circle. Then he sent it whirling along the floor.

The square was very happy. It was now able to move from place to place, travelling on its circumference.

There was one drawback, however. The poor square, accustomed to a stationary position, became dizzy by the constant circular motion. After a time it told the wheelwright, "I'm so giddy that I don't know whether I'm coming or going. Can't you arrange matters so that I can be a square for a little while and preserve my equilibrium?"

"That may not be," the wheelwright said. "I've changed you from a square to a circle, but I can't reverse the process. You can't have the best of both worlds. You're a circle now, and you must follow the laws that govern your new estate. You can go forward, but you can't go back."

25. WARS OF THE SPHERES AND CUBES

We have all read about the Wars of the Roses, but few have ever heard about the fierce battles between the cubes and the spheres.

The antagonism between these two geometrical species goes back a long time. Each side has produced learned historians who have defended and justified one side or the other.

"The cube," according to one of its apologists, "is down-to-earth, solid, stable, conservative, and steady. It does not fly into action like a sphere, but acts pragmatically, methodically, and effectively."

The sphere has not lacked champions. A partisan historian writes, "The sphere is extremely agile and therefore sees all sides of any issue under discussion. It cherishes the belief that movement is progress and that static inertia is wholly unacceptable. Its views are progressive and spiritual, for it touches the ground at only one point of tangency at a time."

All class warfare originated in the antagonism that arose from the clash between these two geometrical configurations. Societies have been polarized

by these two philosophies, one extolling the cubical view of life, and the other, the spheroidal. Even in art the Cubists have achieved a dominant role.

In a recent speech, the leader of the cubes roundly asserted, "All our depressions have been caused by the unstable spheres. There will be no improvement in society until we have eliminated their pernicious influence."

To this the leader of the spheres replied, "The problems of inflation are rooted in the cubical theory of life. Progress will not be possible until the political views of the cubes are decisively rejected by the electorate."

It's really very difficult to decide which side is right. A college student who tried to study both sides and come to a balanced conclusion had a nervous breakdown. A psychologist conducted a study to show that all human beings at birth incline either toward the cubical or the spheroidal view of life, and that the struggle for survival is traceable to this unconscious predilection. As external proof he points to the fact that the Earth is a sphere whereas the houses man builds seem to be shaped like cubes.

It's all very difficult to explain, but so is the antagonism of one country for another and the conversion of life on Earth into a jungle existence. It would be so much nicer if people could argue about the relative merits of cubes and spheres instead of wasting their time destroying each other.

26. PERCEPTIVE EYES

A young man came to a teacher and asked to be taught.

"Tell me about your eyes," the teacher said.

The student was nonplussed. "What can I tell you about them?" he asked. "They're perfectly normal and give me no trouble whatsoever."

"Think about the matter," admonished the teacher, "and the next time you come, provide me with the results of your reflections."

For several days the young man pondered, wondering what he was expected to say. Finally he returned to the teacher.

"I really can't make heads or tails about your inquiry regarding my eyes," the student stammered. "There's nothing wrong with them. I've had them since childhood, and they've served me well. It's true that I may have abused them by reading too many books, but they've never failed me."

"Is there anything else you have to confide?" asked the teacher.

"For the life of me I can't think of anything else. Why don't you look at them yourself and judge?"

The teacher mused. "Heed, then," he declared, "what I have to say. The eyes of a businessman set a price on everything. The eyes of a fool gild everything with ignorance. The eyes of a self-seeking person color everything with ambition. The eyes of a dreamer see a rose where there is only a buttercup. The eyes of a politician see votes where there are people. The eyes of an inebriate see happiness in a bottle. The eyes of the hunter see the leaping deer, but not the flower-bedecked meadow. Do you gather my meaning?"

The student was silent for a long minute, and when he spoke, there was understanding in his voice. "And the eyes of the mystic see the world in the light of his own compassion; the sage sees time under the aspect of eternity."

The teacher smiled. "Rightly have you understood."

27. THE BONES OF A DEAD CAMEL

On his deathbed, Babu's father confided his last thoughts to his son.

"I leave to you my carpet shop in the bazaar," said the father, although he was barely able to breathe, "but I do so on one condition. You must put the care of your soul above the demands of business. The inner life must come first. Find your own soul before you concern yourself overmuch with business profits."

"I promise," said the young man, "that I shall surely do as you say."

"You have greatly relieved me," the father gasped—and shortly thereafter expired.

Babu took good care of the business and it prospered greatly. In fact, he became so busy that he found little time to cultivate his soul. Sometimes, just before dropping off to sleep after a busy day, he remembered his promise to his dying father and vowed that he would keep it—but he never did.

A year passed and Babu had become a rich man—so rich that his varied enterprises kept him busy from dawn until sunset.

One night he heard a great noise on the roof of his house. He went up to investigate.

As he stood there in the dark, he heard a sepulchral voice that said, "I am the ghost of your father."

"The ghost of my father," exclaimed Babu. "What are you doing here?"

"I am looking for the bones of a dead camel."

Babu was puzzled. "That's ridiculous," he cried. "How do you expect to find the bones of a dead camel on the roof of this house?"

"And how do you expect to find your soul in the bazaar?" answered the sepulchral voice.

28. TYING UP THE CAT

A pious tradesman practiced meditation every morning before setting out for work. This experience gave him the inner strength he needed in order to meet the exigencies of the day. His cat, however, posed a problem. It mewed softly as he meditated and rubbed its back against his leg. Annoyed by this interference, the tradesman formed the habit of tying the cat to the bedpost before he started his daily meditation. Before he passed away, he advised his sons to follow his example and to have a quiet period before entering upon the

affairs of the day.

His sons dutifully followed his counsel. They, too, meditated each morning—and, being similarly annoyed by the antics of the cat, tied it to the bedpost.

One generation after the other followed the same procedure. The time came, however, when the pace of life became swifter and the conduct of business more demanding. The more modern representatives, because of the increased pressure entailed by their commercial ventures, shortened the period of meditation.

Finally, a modern descendant instituted another change. He simply tied the cat to the bedpost and skipped the meditation altogether, believing that he was faithfully adhering to the advice that his ancestor had given.

29. GEOLOGICAL PATIENCE

A certain teacher acquired a reputation for his wisdom. Among those who came to be taught was a young man eager to make progress. After a few weeks he became impatient at the slowness with which he was learning.

“I have been here three weeks,” he complained to the teacher, “and have very little to show for my efforts. Must everything go at a snail’s pace? Isn’t there a quicker method?”

The teacher pondered the question.

“The next time you come,” said the teacher, “bring with you a chart of the geological periods through which the Earth has passed.”

This seemed to be a strange request, but the young man complied. When he came to see the teacher the next time, he held a geological chart in his hand.

“Now tell me,” said the teacher, “how long the Cenozoic Period lasted.”

“The chart says sixty-three million years,” the student replied.

“And the Mesozoic Period?” asked the teacher.

“Two hundred and thirty million years,” answered the student.

“And the Paleozoic Period?”

“Six hundred million years.”

“It took all that time simply to build the environment in which man can function,” the teacher declared. “To develop a soul is an even more arduous task, is it not?”

“I should think so,” the student agreed.

“Now how long did you say you have been studying with me?”

The student saw the point.

30. THE MALIGNED PIG

A sociologist sat in his study discoursing on his latest theory with his

colleagues.

"After due consideration," the sociologist averred, "I have come to the conclusion that the common pig is a most maligned creature. He has been described as filthy, foul-smelling, and gluttonous."

"Do you deny it?" asked one of his colleagues.

"I maintain that the pig is not so at birth," said the sociologist. "It is corrupted by the social order. Its natural instincts are perverted by society. It is the victim of class conscious and racist discrimination."

"How could you prove that?" a colleague wanted to know.

After a moment the sociologist proposed an experiment. "I shall take a new-born pig and raise it in a more congenial environment, proving thereby that it is inherently a clean and respectable creature."

The sociologist was as good as his word. He bought a new-born pig and gave it the best treatment imaginable. Every day he bathed it so that its skin glistened. Delicate perfumes suffused the air it breathed both day and night. Choice food and sparkling water were placed before it daily.

All went well, and the sociologist had half-finished a monograph on the manner in which a perverse society has misrepresented the pig when a strange thing happened.

All of a sudden the pig disappeared and could nowhere be found. The sociologist was distraught and instituted a thorough search.

Finally the pig was found. It had taken refuge in a foul-smelling sty.

31. THE UNSHARED CARROT

An old woman who had been mean and grouchy throughout her life finally passed through the Gate of Death.

She found herself, as one might suspect, in a very unpleasant place. It was always excessively hot, and she was forced by demons to do all kinds of disagreeable work. This was, of course, not to her liking, but there wasn't much she could do about it. On Earth she could have written to her Congressman or lodged a complaint in court, but such methods were not applicable in the overheated inferno.

Finally she appealed—of all places—to heaven. Day after day she prayed for the right to emigrate and get out of her misery. After a time her plea was heard, and a resplendent angel appeared at the place where heaven and hell abut upon one another.

The angel was sympathetic, but not very encouraging. "Your record doesn't do you much credit," he said, "and we can't arbitrarily make exceptions. Search your memory, however, and see whether you can remember doing a single good deed while you lived on Earth. If you can find one, we may perhaps be able to help you."

The old lady brooded a long time, trying to remember performing at least one good deed. After a time she recollected that she had once in her earthly life

given a carrot to a person who begged for alms.

She invoked the angel and told him the good news.

“Yes,” the angel told her, “that good deed might make a difference.”

He vanished from sight, but a short time later reappeared, holding a carrot in his hand.

“Take hold of the root of this carrot,” he said, “and I shall pull you up to heaven with it.”

The old lady grasped it tightly and found herself being lifted off the ground. When the other denizens of hell saw what was happening, they also took hold of the carrot in the hope that they could escape from their prison in like manner.

The added pressure on the carrot threatened to break it. The old lady became fearful that it would be unable to stand the strain.

“Get away,” she cried angrily. “This carrot belongs to me.”

At this moment the angel let go, and the old lady fell back with a thud into the infernal regions.

“If the carrot belongs to you,” the angel declared, “then you didn’t give it away after all.”

32. RELATING THE PART TO THE WHOLE

Called away by urgent business, a master watchmaker assigned an apprentice the task of taking care of the shop. The person chosen had a pleasing personality, but lacked experience.

Some time thereafter a student of philosophy entered the shop and asked to have his watch repaired.

“Come back in a week,” said the apprentice.

The apprentice took the watch apart and studied each component with great care.

When the student of philosophy returned at the end of the week, the apprentice said, “I have taken the watch apart, but I cannot discover what is wrong. Return again in another week.”

The student of philosophy went away and came back at the designated time.

“I know what is wrong and have corrected it,” the apprentice explained, “but I haven’t put the parts together again. It will take me another week to do so.”

After the stipulated time had elapsed, the student of philosophy reappeared.

The apprentice was apologetic. “I have taken the watch apart and corrected what was wrong, but I can’t seem to be able to put the watch in order again.”

“You remind me of the human race,” the student of philosophy commented. “We know how to take things apart, but not to put them together

again. We can dissect problems, but not amend them.”

At this point the master watchmaker returned. Informed of the problem, he skillfully organized the parts so that the watch once again functioned.

Upon returning the mechanism to the student, the watchmaker commented, “The Great Timekeeper has split up past, present, and future into different parts, but where is the master artisan who can put them together into an integrated whole?”

33. CIRCE’S MAGIC

Not being able to fall asleep one night, I picked up a book on mythology and started to read. I was at the point where the sailors of Ulysses were changed into swine by the enchantress Circe when I nodded for a moment.

Suddenly I saw a mist at the foot of my bed. In a few minutes it took shape and I recognized my visitor.

“As I live and breathe,” I exclaimed, “if it isn’t Circe.”

“None other,” she replied.

“Where is your wand?” I asked.

“In other days I used it,” she said, “but today it’s not at all necessary.”

“I thought you needed it to transform human beings into swine.”

“It doesn’t require a wand to change people into pigs these days,” she explained. “There was a time when it taxed my skill in magic to bring about this transformation, but in this day and age it’s much simpler.

“The fermented grape and the crushed poppy do the work for me,” she told me. “Haven’t you noticed how many people are changed into animals by hard liquor and drugs?”

“I did,” I acknowledged, “but I didn’t ascribe this metamorphosis to your influence.”

“Nowadays I simply play on a few natural inclinations.”

“Converting natural man into animal man is rather easy,” I said. “Why don’t you try to convert natural man into spiritual man?”

“That would really require magic,” she declared.

“If human beings can be degraded into pigs, why couldn’t they be elevated to the state of angels?”

“It’s possible,” she admitted, “but only if you can change their inclinations. At present they seem to be motivated to move in the other direction.”

So saying, she suddenly vanished.

34. THE INTERNATIONAL SPIRIT

A medical doctor who believed in the brotherhood of man was troubled by

the fact that this progressive concept had been so generally rejected by people and nations.

To dramatize the issue, he took the body of a man who had been horribly mutilated in an accident and gave him a series of transplants. Into this body he engrafted the liver of an Englishman, the kidney of a Russian, the lung of a Chinese, and the spleen of an Italian.

Pointing to this patched-up gentleman, the doctor declared, "Here you have the international man. This person is a triumph of medical art, the symbol of the cooperation of nations."

When the gentleman whose body had become an international museum was asked whether he felt any affinity for the nations that had contributed the transplants, he said, "Not at all. I'm as fiercely patriotic as ever."

The medical doctor was deeply disturbed.

A college professor who had learned about this experiment tried to achieve results by a different method. He taught his students a philosophy of life that was one-fifth Russian, one-fifth French, one-fifth Spanish, one-fifth American, and one-fifth Japanese. He expected those who assimilated this eclectic philosophy to be well-disposed towards international cooperation. His disappointment was deep when his most promising student turned out to be a chauvinist.

A hermit who heard about these experiments was heard to say, "The body and the head avail little. The plant must grow in the heart."

35. THE SOUL OF PSYCHOLOGY

A professor found himself in the midst of multiplying troubles. His salary was cut, his students were increasingly insolent, his colleagues were antagonistic, and his investments in stocks were daily diminishing in value. His deep frustrations led to erratic behavior.

Finally his wife said to him, "It's all a sign that you ought to search for your soul."

The idea was a rather novel one for the professor. "Do you really think so? How does one go about finding the soul?"

"You might go to a psychologist," his wife suggested. "He, if anyone, should know something about the science of the soul."

The next day the professor went to see a psychologist who belonged to the behavioristic school.

"I should like to find my soul," the professor declared simply.

"We study behavior, not soul, here," the psychologist corrected him, "and in order to do so we start with rats and mice."

"I never liked them. Why must you study these creatures?" the professor protested. "Besides, I'm more concerned with my soul than the behavior of rodents."

"The rat," explained the psychologist, "gives us a simplified picture of all

human behavior."

"Why not study a horse, a lion, or an elephant," the professor asked.

"All behaviorists have settled on the rat," said the psychologist decisively.

"But I've spent a good part of my life destroying rats," the professor exclaimed. "Above all, I'm interested in finding my soul, not in studying rats."

With that, the professor said good day and left.

The second psychologist he consulted was a Gestaltist.

"I'm glad you are concerned about your soul," said the Gestaltist, "but we believe that man is closest to the ape, and we study monkeys."

"Head of my grandfather," exclaimed the professor frustratedly, "when I ask about my soul the behaviorists talk about rats, and you talk about monkeys. I am interested in neither."

This consultation proved to be short and unsatisfactory so the following week the professor went to a psychoanalyst.

When the professor stated his purpose, the psychoanalyst looked at him quizzically.

"Your soul lies buried in the deep recesses of your subconscious," said the psychoanalyst, "but I must tell you in all candor that no member of my profession has ever found it."

"Well, what did you find?" the professor queried.

"We found sex," the psychoanalyst asserted. "It's the mainspring of all human behavior."

"Do you mean to say that in order to find my soul I must first study sex exhaustively?"

"That's one way of putting it," the psychoanalyst admitted.

The professor was disturbed by this information. "First it's rats, then it's monkeys, and now it's sex. These subjects are irrelevant."

"Then I am afraid," said the psychoanalyst diplomatically, "that I can't help you."

When he arrived home, he shared his frustrations with his wife.

"You'll have to do it by yourself," she finally concluded.

"But where shall I look?" he asked.

"In your own heart," she replied.

36. LIVING IN THOUGHT

"In an occult book I have come upon the statement that energy follows thought," said a student to a sage. "What does it mean?"

"Many people seem to believe that energy follows eating," the sage observed. "There are others who hold that energy arises from a blustering attempt to thrust oneself forward in the world. Another common notion is that the search for gold generates a copious supply of energy."

"Would you say, then, that such activities produce motion on the physical

plane, that is, a rearrangement of shapes and forms, but not really the energy that determines destiny?" the student asked.

"Quite right," nodded the sage. "Some people spend their lives simply rearranging things on the physical level. However, I should like to change the statement about which you have inquired and say, Energy follows imagination."

"What difference does that make?" the student inquired.

"Actually, imagination is a form of thought," the sage mused, "but a special kind which goes beyond that which is and considers that which might be. When we say that energy follows thought, we indicate that a man ought to live in the world of ideas, not in the domain of emotions and instincts."

"Could one also live in the imagination?" the student asked.

"People who are prone to worry," answered the sage, "live in the negative shadow of the imagination. There is a constructive aspect, however, that can be stimulating."

"Can you provide an example?" the student questioned.

"I shall speak from my own experience," countered the sage. "In some of my meditations I imagine myself as a shimmering butterfly sitting on a twig for a moment and then flying upward into the heart of the resplendent sun. Or again, I imagine myself to be a well of clear, refreshing water in the midst of a garden redolent with flowers where weary travelers can find rest. Sometimes I imagine myself to be a mountain, rising upward in aspiration to the rarefied heights where the clouds gather."

"How would you rephrase the original statement succinctly?" inquired the student.

"Live in creative ideas and uplifting imagination that spell out a noble destiny for the human race," was the answer.

37. RECOGNITION OF GIFTS

A dealer in wax received a large shipment of tallow. He put it in a huge vat and liquefied it.

Inasmuch as he wished to reward his apprentices for their loyal service to him, he decided to confer a gift on them.

Calling them together, he said, "My vat contains a large supply of wax. I shall give each of you an ample amount that you may use as you wish."

The apprentices were pleased, but each one used the wax in a different way.

The first apprentice made candles out of the wax and sold them for a considerable profit.

The second used what he received in manufacturing soap.

The third ground the wax into bits and produced a valuable lubricant.

The fourth carved the wax into figures of saints and Buddhas.

The fifth could find no use for the substance and roundly declared that the

so-called gift was nothing but a burden.

The dealer commented, "A gift is not recognized as a gift until we make use of it. It's very much like Time, Life, and Soul."

38. THE DOCTRINE OF USELESS THINGS

Buddhist monks are told to pick up what people throw away and find a use for such discarded materials.

A monk who was metaphysically inclined meditated on this theme.

"What do people throw away as useless?" he asked himself.

"An ordinary man," he reflected, "may lose his life, but only a spiritual man can find it.

"Life, which is precious, is treated as though it were without value. In wars, human lives are destroyed indiscriminately.

"Thought, a wondrous essence, is neglected in favor of irrational passion and deluding emotion.

"The soul, a priceless gift, is declared non-existent and therefore useless."

"Many people see no value in emptiness, and yet it is a concept charged with meaning. Space is called emptiness, yet in space we live and move and have our being. The activities of men are often empty of content, but they know it not. If we could empty ourselves, we might see wonders."

And so the monk thought long and hard about what people generally discard. Towards the end of his life he was asked to express briefly what he had gained from his meditation.

"I have found spiritual riches in that which people throw away," he said.

39. THE NEW ETHICS

The gods left the Earth, then the half-gods, and then the heroes. At length only frail men were left, timorous, doubting, and self-centered.

The age had arrived when no man could be found with any useful qualities. Such attributes as nobility, magnanimity, courage, goodness, and spirituality had been redefined to fit the modern temper.

Finally no one could be found to govern, to teach, or to judge, for they did not possess the moral qualities necessary to perform such arduous roles in society.

A few persons urged that men return to the cultivation of the old-fashioned virtues, but others had a different idea, and prevailed.

"Let us," said the modernists, "establish a Public Relations Agency whose function would be to invest human beings with qualities they do not possess. A scoundrel, for example, would be described again and again as a

public benefactor, and he could then enter politics. A man who had more words than ideas would be described as a great sage and could become a teacher. A self-seeking bribe-taker could be described as a man of integrity and could become a judge.”

Inasmuch as there was a dearth of people who possessed spiritual qualities, and since it would take too much effort to develop substantial virtues, this idea found much favor. From that time forth, there was always a surplus of politicians, teachers, and judges.

The theory was fine, but in due time there were wars, famines, floods, earthquakes, revolutions, and crises of every description.

The Public Relations Agency is having a harder time these days. Its directors are trying to show that the calamities are really blessings.

40. PATHS OF GREATNESS AND SMALLNESS

There are two ways to enter heaven and to pass through the seventy-two veils that separate a man from the Highest.

The first method is the Way of Enlargement, in which the striver expands the seed of greatness in himself and realizes that the universe floats in the vessel of his heart. He rends the separating veils that stand between the outer and the inner.

The second method is the Way of Smallness, in which the striver progressively empties the contents of his ego. He becomes so small that he can pass easily through the impeding veils. This is sometimes called *kenosis*. The humble move on this path.

These methods are not mutually exclusive. The heart itself provides us with a symbol, for it contracts and expands. In contracting, it becomes smaller; in dilating, larger.

In facing the problems of life, we do well to consider the morning glory, that knows when to fold up and become small and when to open up and expand.

The question thus arises, how small can we become, and how large? Blake tells us that we should see a world in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower. The drop mirrors the ocean, and the ocean mirrors the drop.

41. THE TEST OF DISABILITIES

A student was told by his teacher to climb the mountain and achieve the perspective of the summit.

After a time the young man complained, “The path is hard. There are hindering boulders on every hand. The task is too arduous; the impediments, too obstructive. Sickness enfeebles; multiplying cares distract; time diminishes ardor.”

The teacher replied, “Aesop was a hunchback and a slave, yet his works have been read for two and a half thousand years. Helen Keller was deaf and blind, but she achieved culture and distinction. Sarah Biffin was born without hands or feet, but she became a portrait painter. Milton wrote his greatest poetic work in poverty, when he had lost his eyesight. Francesco Landini was blind, but he became a skilled organist and a notable composer. Mozart was poverty-stricken, but his compositions have enchanted the world. They mastered their disabilities.”

The teacher paused for a moment, and then asked, “Now what did you say your impediments are?”

“Small by comparison,” the student replied. “You’ve helped me put a sluggish wing in order again.”

42. SAVING THE WORLD

“How shall we save the world?” the disciples asked the Master, “for it is clear that our city is threatened by chaos.”

“The saving truths must be set forth,” the Master replied.

“What are they?” one disciple inquired.

“They are three,” said the Master, “the principle of cooperation, the principle of sharing, and the principle of joint responsibility for the whole human race.”

Time passed, and nothing happened. Finally the Master inquired whether any progress had been made.

“None,” confessed a disciple. “We know what to write but have not the needed skill to express the saving truths with literary craftsmanship. Therefore have we decided to wait until we have mastered the art of writing.”

“There was once a king,” the Master said, “who discovered that the enemy was at the gates, beleaguering the city. He immediately commanded his scribes to issue a proclamation ordering general resistance. The scribes began to dispute among themselves regarding the literary style in which the king’s order should be written—and while they disputed, the city fell.”

“Does this tale apply to us?” a disciple wanted to know.

“If those who know can’t write, and those who can write don’t know, how can the city be saved?” the Master declared.

43. THE GOOD OF THE WHOLE

“War is terrible,” said a young man to a sage, “but allowing evil to triumph by doing nothing is even worse. How can this dilemma be resolved?”

“The problem is age-old,” replied the sage. “Not to fight may destroy more lives than determined resistance. On the other hand, fighting may simply

sow the seeds of future wars.”

“What can one do?” anxiously inquired the young man.

“The universe is upheld by justice,” replied the sage, “and if this is true for the universe, it is also true for man.”

“How shall one define justice?” the young man wondered, “for that seems to be the crux of the matter.”

“Justice is the good of the whole,” answered the sage. “Interpretations of this concept determine destiny. Fractional interpretations are fateful. Sit atop the sun and look at the Earth if you would achieve a larger perspective.”

“Can war be banished?”

“The inner war, fought in one’s own breast,” explained the sage, “is inevitable and unceasing. No one is exempt from the task of fighting the enemy within. He who does not engage in this battle forfeits his own kingdom.”

44. CARGO

Two men, an artist and a metaphysician, were accustomed to watch the ships that entered and left the harbor. They admired the sleek craft that glided without apparent effort through the undulant sea. They sometimes speculated on the cargoes that the vessels carried and the destinations for which they were bound.

One day the metaphysician asked, “In what way is yonder ship like you?”

The artist was at a loss for a reply.

“You, like the ship,” explained the metaphysician, “are a frail vessel upon the ocean of life.”

“True, said the artist,” and I am buffeted by the tides of fortune and subjected at times to squalls and tempests.”

“As the boat has a rudder, so do you have a direction-determining will,” the metaphysician pointed out.

“I have a port of origin and a port of destination.”

“You must stay above the water, or the emotions, lest you founder.”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” confided the artist.

“The cargo of the ship is not known to you,” said the metaphysician, “nor is the cargo contained in a human being known to him.”

45. EARTH WRITES A LETTER

Man became so intolerable that the Earth protested. She wrote the following letter to the Sun.

“The burden of my complaint is man.

“He pollutes my rivers.

“He cuts down my forests.

"He destroys the natural beauty I have provided.

"He soaks the Earth with the blood of those he slays in battle.

"He confiscates my gold and precious stones.

"He discharges atomic bombs that fracture my body and wrack my nerves. Such explosions threaten all life on Earth.

"He wastes my natural resources.

"He utilizes my gifts for trivial purposes.

"Above all, he has the effrontery to divide my surface into property plots and to declare that he owns my circumference.

"I petition you for the redress of my varied and justified grievances."

46. LIGHT AS RELATIONSHIP

A physicist said in a lecture that light is generated by a relationship of opposites, that is, by a flow of electrons between a negative and a positive pole.

A theologian who was in the audience wrote the following comment on this concept in his diary.

"Light is an effect of a rapport established between opposites. In a battery, the electrodes may be carbon and zinc. On a higher plane, the polarities are spirit and matter. In our lives they may be discipline and permissiveness, wisdom and ignorance, right and wrong.

"Justice and mercy are opposites. An interplay must be established between them. If God were wholly just, the Earth would be destroyed; and if he were wholly merciful, anarchy would ensue. Light arises when the two are wisely related. We must be justly merciful and mercifully just.

"Good and evil are two poles. The striver must first identify himself with good; then, he must relate himself and it to the opposite so that the negative pole sends its electrons to the positive and is consumed in the process. Thus evil is transmuted into good, and the tension produced creates light. Aspiration generates the voltage or pressure that results in an interplay between the two poles. The end effect is light; the means are the current produced by the tension that makes the negative subservient to the positive. Out of evil, good, sums up the purpose. Meditation, aspiration, invocation, and prayer are generators of the voltage that causes the light-producing electrons to flow. Herein may be found man's purpose in life."

47. CONCEALMENT

A rich merchant wished to send a treasure of money and precious stones from one city to another. However, the area that lay between the two cities was desolate and infested with brigands and thieves. Every now and then there were reports of merchants who had been waylaid while journeying and stripped of all their belongings.

The rich merchant asked a number of tradesmen to undertake the journey, but they refused, saying that the mission was too dangerous. At length the rich man confided in a psychologist, telling him that no one wished to embark on such a hazardous venture.

"If you can't find anyone," the psychologist remarked, "I'd be willing to oblige you by undertaking the journey myself."

The merchant was quite pleased and gladly delegated to the other the task of conveying treasure to the distant city.

The psychologist embarked on the journey and arrived safely at his destination. When he returned, the rich man was curious to know how the psychologist had escaped the perils of traveling through such a dangerous area.

"I knew full well what had befallen other wayfarers," the psychologist explained, "so I realized that I had to proceed in a different fashion. First, I dressed myself in rags so that I looked like a tatterdemalion, for people are prone to judge by appearances. Second, I gathered together a number of bales filled with worthless straw and paper. Wherever I went, I spoke of them as my most valuable possessions. I put the bales on a cart and started on my journey. The treasure you confided to me I carefully concealed on my person in an old weatherbeaten pouch. As I anticipated, thieves fell upon me and stole all my worthless paraphernalia. Of course, I raised a hue and cry, telling my story with much weeping and lamentation to whoever would listen to me. In this way I reached my destination."

"You acted wisely," said the rich merchant.

"God hides his treasures in the commonplace," replied the psychologist. "The soul lies buried in the human form and many a man spends a lifetime without finding it."

48. THE INVISIBLE

The senses argued among themselves as to which was the most important.

"Without me," said the eyes, "the tenant of the body could not see the sky, stars, rivers, and mountains."

"Without me," said the ears, "he could not hear the whisper of the raindrops."

"Without me," said the nostrils, "he could not appreciate the wonder of a rose garden."

"Without me," said the tongue, "all his food would taste insipid."

"Without me," said the skin, "he would be a completely unfeeling creature."

They were still arguing when the mind interposed.

"All your reports," it declared, "would never be registered and therefore have no meaning were it not for me. I interpret your sendings and make sense out of them, for they would otherwise be a mere jumble of stimuli. It's true that I cannot be seen, felt, heard, or smelled, but that simply means I'm above the

senses. The invisible is the most important part of man. Therein lies his greatness."

49. THE UNUSED FIDDLE

For many years an old fiddle lay in its case unused. The owner had long ago given up playing it. As he became increasingly interested in business ventures, he found less and less time to make the fiddle speak. Finally he put it in the garret, where it gathered dust for many a year.

At first the fiddle was patient, but as the years passed, it became disconsolate. "There are so many melodies in me waiting to be played, but here I stand with all the music shut up inside me. The majesty of the mountains, the delicate shimmer of moonbeams on the placid lake, the murmur of whispering waters as they wander to the distant sea, the subtle music of the stars as they spray the evening sky with scintillating light—all this dwells in me unexpressed. Like the soul in man, my melodies remain unheard. How changed the sad world would be if the delicate harmonies of my spirit were breathed forth by my strings."

50. THE LAW VS. HUMANITY

A strange case was recently tried before the High Court. It involved the entire human race and its right to continue its activities on the face of the Earth.

The prosecution contended that man had demonstrated again and again his unfitness to hold the fiefdom called Earth, which had been assigned to him by a sovereign power. The defence maintained that humanity, though misguided and immature, deserved more time to justify its continued existence on the planet.

Evidence of divers kinds was adduced, and the argument grew heated. "Your Honor," cried the prosecutor, "man was put on Earth to do good and to manifest at least in some measure the divine wisdom of his Maker. How has he fulfilled his assignment? The records of history show that he has engaged in unceasing war, destroying his fellows with ever more lethal weapons. The crimes committed in almost any one day in so-called civilized countries offend the most elementary sense of justice. Neither earthquake, famine, nor flood has caused him to change his ways, for he is unteachable. The greatest prophets have been sent to help him, but he has scorned them. He gropes in darkness and calls his ignorance wisdom. Every invention he turns to materialistic uses, and every blessing to the enlargement of his ego. I contend that he has forfeited his right to use the Earth as a privileged tenant and that he should be summarily removed from its surface."

"Not so, Your Honor," spoke up the lawyer for the defence. "I cannot

deny that man has been guilty of many wrongs, but I contend that they arise from ignorance and can be cured by time. That he is shortsighted I will admit, but not that he is incorrigible. The flame of sacrifice still burns in his heart and flames forth now and again in adversity. The nobility in him is like a spark amidst ashes that is obscured by smoke. He may not at present express the divine qualities to which he is heir, but the harsh blows of fortune are master teachers, and in due time he will move away from the world of effects and seek the world of causes. For his sake I beg you to be merciful and allow him to continue to grope his way to more light on the face of the Earth."

The trial ended and everyone waited for the Judge to speak. His judgment, when it was given, pleased neither the prosecution nor the defence, for he simply said, "Sentence deferred."

51. TAMPERING WITH IGNORANCE

Recent decisions by the courts have established new rights for the individual citizen. The protection of the law is being extended to more persons. For instance, the courts have decided that schoolchildren have constitutional rights that their teachers must respect.

This legal interpretation has given rise to curious lawsuits.

A pupil who was lazy, inattentive, and obstreperous received a failing grade, and his father immediately instituted a lawsuit against the teacher.

When the case came before the judge, the lawyer hired to defend the pupil said, "Your Honor, I maintain that my client has been deprived of one of the fundamental rights of man, the right to his ignorance. By what statutory law can we compel a person to become wise? For ages men have tenaciously held on to their ignorance, refusing to part with it. Neither wars nor natural calamities have shaken them in their resolution. Why should my client, prizing his ignorance as do most men, be penalized for resenting any attempt to tamper with it?"

The lawyer for the defence demurred. "Isn't education by definition supposed to involve a progressive reduction or diminution of ignorance?"

"It used to be so," said the Judge, "but times change. I shall have to consult some prominent educators in regard to this matter."

The Judge did as he promised, and after a few days resumed the trial.

"Standards are no longer what they used to be," the Judge declared. "In the past, if a pupil failed, the blame was assigned to him. Today the teacher is at fault. If a student is found to be illiterate, he is adjudged a victim of social circumstances and promoted or graduated regardless of this minor blemish. In this case the student is defending one of the rights that the human race since the beginning of time has considered more precious than wisdom and understanding. A decrease in the pupil's ignorance might totally change his character and identity. I therefore find the teacher guilty as charged."

52. ACCIDENT AND DESIGN

An employer now and then discussed metaphysics with his chief clerk. Once they spoke about the purpose of the universe.

"It's all a colossal accident," the chief clerk asserted.

The employer disagreed. "The Earth moves about the sun; the seasons regularly follow one another; the fields yield grain and cereals. How do you explain all this?"

"Accident," responded the chief clerk promptly.

The employer did not continue the argument but went his way. At the end of the week the chief clerk came for his paycheck.

"I have been thinking about our conversation," the employer said, "and I have decided that your interesting views may have a practical application. It seems to me that you really have done no work this week and therefore do not deserve to be paid."

The chief clerk protested. "Didn't I come on time each day?"

"Accident," said the employer.

"Well, didn't I work eight hours and sort endless quantities of paper?" asked the clerk.

"Sheer accident."

The clerk enumerated all he had done, but was always met with the same reply.

Finally the employer concluded the conversation. "You cannot prove your case," he said, "but if your activities are the result of design, might it not be appropriate to apply the same logic to the universe?"

53. BRIDGE TALK

A graceful bridge that arched a broad river of sparkling water was troubled. It confided its melancholy thoughts to a tortoise that sat ruminating on a boulder that jutted out of the stream.

"No one understands me," said the bridge. "Here I have been sitting year after year and innumerable people have marched over my back, but no one seems to know what I really stand for."

"You're expecting too much from the human race," commented the tortoise. "It's a mistake we all make. But how do you evaluate your own meaning?"

"I am firmly planted on both shores," explained the bridge, "and I arch through the air, above the Earth and the water."

"That's not hard to understand," said the tortoise, "but what does it mean?"

"It's all symbolic," sighed the bridge, "but nobody seems to know it. I am a linking agent, uniting opposites. To achieve this I rise above matter and

above the watery emotions and define a roadway in the air.”

“Well,” said the tortoise, “I never thought about that myself, and if I didn’t, what can you expect from man?”

“The opposites must be identified and linked,” said the bridge, “but this lesson that I preach by my very existence remains unlearned. Even the architect who built me didn’t know it.”

“Why is that bit of information so important?” asked the tortoise.

“The fate of the human race may depend on it,” answered the bridge, “and therefore the fate of the planet.”

“Is that so?” murmured the tortoise. “Who would have thought it?”

“Consider the matter,” suggested the bridge. “If man could build a bridge between ignorance and wisdom, or between the unreal and the real, or between chaos and beauty, what an achievement that would be. And it could all be done if only man would study me. O unthinking race of man!”

The bridge was becoming very excited, so the tortoise made an attempt at pacification. “Calm yourself, calm yourself,” admonished the tortoise. “Be like me. I just go about my own business at my own pace without paying attention to such deep problems. I always did say that no good would come from metaphysical thinking. If the world doesn’t bother itself about these matters, why should you?”

But the bridge could not be mollified. . .

54. CREATION

A teacher of biology was asked to present to his classes various views about the origin of Earth and of man. Consequently he called together persons with different backgrounds and requested each one to express his belief.

“Man arose from the primal ooze,” said a scientist, “and passed through various animal stages before he became human. His origin is traceable to the brute creation.”

“The foundations of the world and everything therein were established in seven days by a beneficent Creator,” declared a Fundamentalist.

Then a kaballist spoke. “Man was a diamond in the mineral kingdom, a rose in the vegetable kingdom, an eagle in the animal kingdom—and he is on the way to become an angel and a god.”

A poet presented a different view. “Every inhabited world is a glistening tear that fell from the eyes of a Supernal Being as he staggered under the cosmic burden of the Great Sacrifice.”

55. THE WORMLESS TRUTH

A scholar came home from the market bearing a sackful of luscious red

apples that diffused a pleasing aroma. Selecting one that looked particularly appetizing, he cut it in half and was about to bite into it when he noticed a worm wriggling at the core.

Surprised, the scholar put the apple on the table and exclaimed, "How did this obnoxious worm get into the core?"

"My forefathers always found food, shelter, and security in the same way I do," the worm replied. "According to our ancient records, a worm just like me was in the apple given to Adam when he was in the Garden of Eden."

"By what right do you gorge yourself on my apple?" the scholar protested.

"I have as much of a right to this apple as you," returned the worm. "What makes you and the human race in general think that you're superior to worms?"

"Well, it's very annoying to find a worm like you in the middle of a luscious apple. I almost lose my appetite watching you."

"What neither you nor countless other human beings seem to realize," retorted the worm, "is that I'm a symbol of something. When you encounter me, something is supposed to dawn in your consciousness, but all you get out of the experience is a sense of being wronged."

"A symbol of what?" questioned the scholar.

"I've read many books, but I've never come upon such a problem."

"Your books aren't worth much, then," said the worm bluntly. "Some of my kin who crawl about in the pages of library tomes have complained of indigestion, and I think I know why."

"Let me think," said the scholar. "You are a symbol of something disagreeable that is to be found in something desirable."

"That's not bad. You're beginning to reason with the clarity of a worm."

"That's about as far as I can get," confessed the scholar.

"Well, then," replied the worm, "I suppose I'll have to tell you. Most of the things that men eagerly grasp and prize have worms in them. All earthly pursuits are characterized in this way. Even the human body, on which people dote, is, in the end, simply food for worms."

"True," reflected the scholar, "but what do you advise us to do?"

"Find the wormless truth," said the wriggling creature as it disappeared into the core of the apple.

56. GOD'S MONEY

A banker who had achieved a reputation for shrewdness and competence suddenly retired from business and lived in seclusion. The financial world speculated on his reasons for withdrawing from the scene at the very time when he was at the height of his power. None of his associates could shed any light on the cause of his unusual, not to say eccentric, behavior.

A journalist got wind of the matter and determined to ferret out the truth. He secured an interview with the banker, but the latter refused to talk about his retirement.

Journalists can be very persistent, however, and after shadowing the banker for six months, the reporter discovered the truth.

"As you know," explained the banker, "I was at the peak of my career when I made the decision to withdraw. It happened in this way. I was reading St. Augustine when I came upon a passage in which he says that human beings are God's money. That set me thinking. All my life I had been making investments without realizing that I myself was an investment. I was God's money on Earth. The powers that be had made an investment in me—but was it a good one? Was I showing a profit or a loss? Was I counterfeit or genuine? Did I yield a valuable return or was I moving in the direction of bankruptcy?"

"These questions perplexed me," the banker continued. "They revealed a new dimension to my life. The more I considered the matter, the more I felt that I ought to consider myself as a cosmic investment and to justify it. And that's what I'm trying to do."

57. THE SERVICE OF TRUTH

A scientist and a metaphysician once found themselves voyaging on the same ship and struck up an acquaintance. It was not long before they became involved in a discussion.

"My philosophy of life," said the scientist, "may be summed up in the phrase, 'the search for truth.'"

The metaphysician pondered this statement for a moment and then observed, "There are as many varieties of truth as there are colors. For example, some truths are disagreeable and others are agreeable. People have been known to prefer one to the other. Which of these you select is a matter of choice."

"I am not concerned whether a truth is either agreeable or disagreeable," the scientist replied.

"I wonder whether you are not talking about laboratory truth," pursued the metaphysician. "Truth is not exhausted by its scientific manifestations. It is also to be found in social behavior, moral principles, and in the arts."

"You have a point there," the scientist conceded. "My commitment is to the truth that can be demonstrated."

"What about the truth that cannot be demonstrated here and now but may be in the far-off future?"

"That's too theoretical for me," the scientist replied.

"The known truth is but a drop in the bucket of the unknown truth," commented the metaphysician. "Respect for what we know is commendable, but we should also prize what we don't know."

"How can we value what hasn't yet been proved?" queried the scientist. "I don't understand that point of view."

"The search for truth," the metaphysician pointed out, "suggests that you are seeking something unknown. If you already had it, you wouldn't need to go

in search of it. Technically speaking, your quest is the unknown rather than the known truth."

The scientist was dubious, but said nothing.

"Then, too," the metaphysician went on, "you should distinguish between small and great truths, outer and inner ones."

"My truths are measurable," the scientist declared.

"Can you use a yardstick to determine the length or breadth of the mind, the soul, or even of a symbol?" the metaphysician queried.

The scientist was not quite pleased by the turn that the conversation had taken. "We're getting into water that is too deep for me," he said with a slight accent of frustration.

"There is one further point," the metaphysician interposed. "Beyond the search for truth lies the service of truth. Simply to reveal facts is only part of the task; often they are misused. Men already know far more than they put into practice. They must be enlisted in the cause of serving the truth, not simply discovering it."

At this point the scientist began to weary of the conversation and turned away in order to attend to more important matters.

58. ON BEING TIRED

After a hard day's work, a tradesman came home and plumped wearily into an easy chair. "How tired I am," he muttered to himself.

An ant that was climbing on a window pane heard this comment and replied, "So am I."

The tradesman, unaccustomed to such a response, was taken aback. "I have been working hard all day," he said at length, "and I am physically fatigued, but you have simply been crawling on my window pane. How, then, are you tired?"

"Like most of your kind," the ant retorted, "you think of everything on the purely material level. I'm tired of watching men, who consider themselves so superior, gadding about on the face of the Earth, wasting their time and substance in fruitless activity, and going to their graves ignorant of their purpose and destiny."

"I just commented that I feel tired," the tradesman observed. "What's wrong about that?"

"You should have said," corrected the ant, "that your body is fatigued. Your physical state points to a much greater problem of which you seem to be unaware. You should be tired of the merry-go-round of what you call human existence. That's a different matter. You should be tired of your materialistic preferences that get you nowhere."

The tradesman pondered the matter.

"When you're physically tired," the ant went on, "you rest. When you're

tired of your lifestyle, you should meditate.”

“If all of us did that,” replied the tradesman, “how would the world’s work ever get done?”

“The world’s work, from my point of view,” observed the ant, “appears to be war, exploitation, greedy aggression, exploding atomic bombs, and building the mudholes called houses. I may be prejudiced, but I think it’s all nine-tenths unnecessary.”

“Well, what would you suggest?” the tradesman asked.

“Ants live by the principle of cooperation,” the little creature commented. “If you really got tired of the chaos you’re creating on the planet, you’d approve of the inscription written over every ant-hive, One for all, and all for One.”

59. THE BONES OF THE UNIVERSE

“What are the bones of the universe?” a monk was asked.

He thought about the question for a time and then replied.

“In a human being, the bones are hidden. They are surrounded by flesh. Upon the structure created by the bones, the entire body is built. They are foundational and supportive.

“In a comparable way, we see everywhere the flesh of the universe. The supporting bones are invisible, and yet they determine the shape of things. In a sense the bones relate to the undergirding principles upon which the universe is built. Perhaps they may be considered to be archetypal forms.

“Both in man and in the universe, the bones are not obvious. The outer relies on the inner.

“The bones define the pattern of the human form, just as girders are the framework of an edifice. The configurations in the heavens may have a similar function. A solar system is a pattern, the bones whereof remain hidden from our sight.

“Mystics have at times spoken of the soul of the universe. Might it not be more appropriate to discover and identify the bones?”

60. THOUGHT FLOWERS

A lama who had spent many years in study and meditation was visited by a student who chanced to be traveling in the area.

“What are your impressions of the lamasery?” asked the lama over a cup of tea.

“I have seen many monks meditating,” observed the student, “but the product of their labors is not evident to me. When a bricklayer works, the result is an edifice. When an engineer puts forth his efforts, we see a bridge. When a

farmer plants crops, we see a field of wheat. But when a monk spends days and even years in meditation, the fruits of his labors are not apparent to me."

The lama smiled. "Labor may be visible or invisible," he said softly.

"How can that be?" the student questioned.

"Some people work in matter," the lama explained, "and other in thought. A teacher plants invisible ideas into the immaterial minds of students. It is a failure of the imagination to define labor purely in terms of physical activity."

"What would imaginative labor be like?" asked the student.

"Let me give you an example," countered the lama. "I have a garden of flowers composed of thought. Every day I fashion bouquets of roses or chrysanthemums and send them forth into the world. Flowers of thought are rare and uplifting, yet inexpensive. It is work that can be done in any season, and it is unaffected by flood or drought. Neither time nor frost can destroy them. No man is so poor that he cannot afford to build a fragrant rose garden composed of the sweet essences of his most beneficent thought. Such work will yield no material wages, but it enriches both the creator and the world. It is a blessing when the light within shines forth as fragrant flowers composed of the rare essences of imagination and aspiration. An ordinary flower garden is beautiful, but a thought-created one is precious. One beautifies the Earth, but the other adorns space."



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20 Nassau Street, Suite 250 East
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(609) 924-0880

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